

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

# ALL THE YEAR ROUND

## A Weekly Journal

CONDUCTED BY

CHARLES DICKENS.

No. 76.—THIRD SERIES. SATURDAY, JUNE 14, 1890.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

### A RED SISTER.

By C. L. PIRKIS.

*Author of "A Dateless Bargain," "At the Moment of Victory," etc., etc.*

#### CHAPTER XXIV.

THE poet who wrote that "Coming events cast their shadows before," gets a flat denial given him at every turn of life's path. This was how Herrick rode forth to Summerhill that morning: depressed, it is true, by mournful memories, solemn with the sense of the responsibilities suddenly laid upon his shoulders, yet withal daring to be joyful in spirit whenever his thoughts turned to Lois and her great love for him.

And this was how he rode back to the Castle, after a brief ten minutes' interview with Mrs. Leyton: sadness and seriousness gone together with his joyfulness, his brain one whirling chaos of anger and gloomy forebodings, the future as much a blank to him as for the nonce the past had become.

His interview with Mrs. Leyton had been as stormy as it had been brief. He had had to wait close upon half an hour before the lady made her appearance, and then she had received him in her robe-de-chambre in her boudoir.

He had lost no time in preliminaries. "The butler tells me Miss White is not here! How is this, Mrs. Leyton? Please explain," he had said as he shook hands.

Whereupon, the little lady had drawn herself up haughtily, and had said: "It is to me, not you, I think that explanations are due."

"I don't understand! Am I dreaming?" Herrick had exclaimed. "Miss

White returned here from the Castle, did she not, early on Friday morning last week?"

"Yes," Mrs. Leyton had replied, "and early on Friday morning last week, Miss White thought fit to pack her box, desire one of my grooms to take it to the Wrexford station, and depart, leaving with one of my maids the exceedingly polite message, that 'circumstances compelled her immediate departure,' nothing more."

"Why in Heaven's name, Mrs. Leyton, did you not send round to me?" Herrick had exclaimed, hotly.

"Why in Heaven's name should I have taken the trouble to do such a thing?" the lady had replied, tartly. "I concluded that it was at your instigation that the young lady was behaving in such an extraordinary fashion. You had spoken to me about your wish for her to stay with certain friends of yours till your marriage. I took it for granted that neither you nor she considered farther explanation to me necessary. I said to my husband, 'This is the polite fashion in which things are generally done at Longridge Castle.'"

The slightly sarcastic tone in which the last words had been spoken, had showed that Mrs. Leyton had neither forgotten nor forgiven the one or two snubs which Lady Joan had dealt her.

Herrick had grown more and more bewildered and distracted. He put a hundred wild and disconnected questions to Mrs. Leyton, which her first words had already sufficiently answered. Had she enquired at Wrexford station, as to Miss White's destination, had she cross-questioned her groom, the maid-servants, also, rigorously?

To all which Mrs. Leyton had replied,

sarcastically still, that in the circumstances she had not thought it necessary to do so, but that if he had any wish to cross-question either the men-servants, or the maids, he was at perfect liberty to do so. And furthermore, in order to avoid embarrassment of any sort to questioned or questioner, she had forthwith wished him "good morning," and had left the room.

As a parting word, the lady had expressed her conviction that to her way of thinking Mr. Gaskell need be under no apprehensions respecting Miss White's safety or comfort. She herself had paid her half-yearly salary only the week before, and there was every likelihood, she opined, that the young lady had, for the present, at any rate, taken refuge in the big orphanage, whence she had recently emerged—St. Margaret's—in the environs of Croydon.

The opportunity of bringing Lady Joan's pride into the dust gone, the lady showed an evident disposition to wash her hands of the Gaskell family, whence so many affronts to her social standing had emanated.

Herrick's cross-questioning of Mrs. Leyton's servants threw little or no further light on the matter. None of the maids had seen Miss White on the morning in question, except the nurse; she stated that at about six o'clock, or half-past, Miss White had come into the nursery with her hat and veil on, and had kissed the children as they lay asleep in their beds. Her impression was, that Miss White was returning to the Castle to stay, and this impression was confirmed by the sound of tears in the young lady's voice, which in the circumstances seemed natural enough.

The groom had even less to tell. He merely stated that Miss White had come to him and asked him at once to take her box to Wrexford station in the luggage-cart, and he had done so. On arriving at the station, he had deposited the box in the cloak-room according to his orders, but the young lady was nowhere to be seen. This was all that Herrick could elicit from the servants.

On leaving the house, however, just as he was bringing his horse to a trot through the Park, the sound of hurried footsteps and his name called made him draw rein and look round.

A young girl, the under nurse as he supposed, came up breathlessly with a letter in her hand. "For you, sir," she said, "Miss White left it in my hands

when she went away. 'I can trust you, Rhoda,' she said, 'it is to be given into Mr. Gaskell's own hand—no one else's—when he comes to the house, but not before.'"

Herrick snatched the letter from the girl, in his eagerness forgetting the fee with which she no doubt expected to be recompensed for her fidelity.

The note, written in a hasty, scrambling hand, was very brief, and ran thus:

"Only a few lines to say good-bye to you. I have felt from the very first that our engagement was a mistake; I am thoroughly convinced now that a marriage between us could bring no happiness. Do not be uneasy as to my future; I am going at once to friends who will protect and advise me. I beg, I implore you make no effort to follow me and find out my hiding-place. Let me, I entreat you, at once and for ever pass out of your life. Believe me, it will be as much for my good as for yours that I should do so. Heaven bless you.

"LOIS."

The letter needed no second reading; its straightforward plainness made it easy enough to understand. The fears and misgivings which he had argued away—scolded away—kissed away—had once more taken possession of her; and, yielding completely to them, she had taken sudden flight. But whither? Who were these friends of whom she spoke so confidently? He knew, or thought he knew, every friend she had ever had. They could be counted on the fingers of one hand—a girl at the big orphanage, a young teacher there who had been kind to her, a cousin of her father's in America, who at one time used to send her Christmas-boxes, and all were told. Who then were these newly-found friends in whom she placed such implicit confidence?

A great wave of jealousy for a moment swept over him that his Lois should flee for refuge to other guardianship than his; it faded, giving place to a darker thought, an ugly suspicion lest this sudden impulsive flight might have been suggested by an older and warier brain than hers. His mother from the first had opposed his choice of a wife; what if she had found opportunity to work on the girl's unselfish misgivings, and had not only suggested this sudden flight of hers, but had supplied her with means to make it, and had found for her a hiding-place at the end of it!

He touched his horse with his whip. Well, thank Heaven that doubt at least

could be decided at once by a question and answer. All his pity, all his respect for his mother for one brief moment seemed engulfed and gone. "She has had her own choice, she has made her own life, why in Heaven's name does she seek to mar mine for me?" was his thought as he sped swiftly along under the Summerhill beeches, which dropped now and again a rough little coffin of a nut into his horse's glossy mane, now and again a damp, blurred leaf.

Only once did he turn his head on his way through the Park. That was to give a rueful glance to the spot where, with light heart and lighter words, he had helped Lois to make her miniature Adonis-garden. A few limp, battered flower-stalks, a handful of mud-spattered petals, was all that was left of it now.

## CHAPTER XXV.

"MOTHER, do you know anything of this?" asked Herrick, standing, white and wrathful, before Lady Joan, with Lois's scrap of a letter in his hand.

Lady Joan had quitted her chair beside the window, and was seated now at her writing-table addressing an envelope. Before she looked up in response to Herrick's question, she carefully reversed her envelope on her blotting-pad.

Lady Joan's troubles were to come now all together it seemed. Not a quarter of an hour ago a momentous piece of intelligence had been communicated to her, and here was Herrick confronting her with such a question as this!

The momentous piece of news had been told her by Parsons in response to her order for Lucy Harwood's immediate attendance, and was to the effect that, nearly a week ago, Lucy had been fetched away by her brother, who evidently considered that she had received her dismissal. Upon hearing this, Lady Joan had at once taken pen in hand, and had written a note to Lucy's brother, requesting him to come and see her immediately.

It was the envelope of this letter that she was addressing when Herrick entered the room.

He had to repeat his question.

Then Lady Joan looked up, and said slowly, as if doing her best to gather together her forces to meet a new difficulty or danger:

"What is 'this'? I do not understand? What is it I am supposed to know?"

For answer, Herrick spread Lois's letter before her, and bade her read it.

And though he stood there closely watching her face as she did so, never so much as change of colour showed her surprise and sense of relief that the young girl had so literally fulfilled the few short and somewhat indefinite instructions she had given her.

She took long to read the few simple lines. He grew impatient.

"Have I to thank you for this?" he asked, hotly, forgetting all his former kindly thought for her, forgetting everything, in fact, in his eager haste to get to the bottom of the mystery.

Lady Joan looked up at him. A slight flush passed over her pale face.

"Directly, no," she answered, with great deliberation; "indirectly, perhaps, yes. I have made no secret to her, to you, to any one of my disapproval of your choice of a wife."

He made a gesture of impatience.

"You can throw no light whatever on this hurried, ill-advised step of hers?" he asked in a restrained voice, desirous to bring her back to the main point.

"None whatever."

Still he was not satisfied.

"It was not in the first instance suggested to her by you?" he questioned, recollecting the two opportunities Lady Joan had had of private conversation with Lois.

Now, surely it could not have been from any refinement of the moral sense that Lady Joan hesitated to speak the glib lie that would have set this matter at rest, but rather through habit of obedience to the maxim, "noblesse oblige," which figured to her in guise of moral code.

She rose with great dignity from her chair, and stood facing him, with her head thrown back, her nostrils dilating.

"Am I to sit here and be cross-questioned by you as if I were a school-girl coining fibs to meet an emergency?" she asked, haughtily. "I have told you already that, if you please, you may connect me indirectly with this young lady's extraordinary conduct. I shall reply to no more questions on the matter."

It was possible that if Lady Joan's mind had not been already greatly disturbed by what to her was a matter of greater moment, she would have adopted a more conciliatory attitude. As it was in default of settled plan, she merely followed the dictates of inclination and instinct.

Herrick was cut off from the possibility of a reply by the door suddenly opening, and Lady Honor entering the room.

She had in her hand a plate with a magnificent bunch of grapes upon it. She had not, since her arrival at the Castle, seen or spoken with Lady Joan, and assuredly could scarcely have selected a more inopportune moment for paying her first visit to her aunt's room; she looked from Herrick to Lady Joan, from Lady Joan to Herrick.

"They told me you had come down," she said, addressing her aunt. "And though Herrick told me not to go near you to-day, I didn't see why I should not. I've been through the grape-houses and picked out the finest bunch I could find for you. Now, you'll devour every one of them, won't you, Aunt Jo—an?"

The last syllable of Lady Joan's name was evidently added as an after-thought. The young lady made this speech somewhat in the manner in which she generally chose to come downstairs—in successive jumps.

Before she was half-way through it, Herrick, with an exclamation of annoyance at the interruption, had left the room.

Yet if he stayed for an hour questioning and cross-questioning his mother, he said to himself after a moment's thought, he did not see what he would gain by it. Lady Joan's manner carried conviction to his mind that she was utterly in ignorance of Lois's movements, and as unprepared as he was for her sudden flight. One thing seemed clear to him; he must go at once without a moment's delay to the big orphanage in the vicinity of Croydon, where, as Mrs. Leyton had suggested, tidings of Lois, if not she herself, might be found.

It was easy for him to say "without a moment's delay," it was not so easy for him to put his intention into execution.

First, there came a telegram from Mr. McGowan, asking when he could see him on an urgent and important matter.

Herrick's reply to this was the somewhat vague one: "When I return from London."

Following this, came a request from Mr. Champneys, the manager of the Wrexford mines, that he might see Mr. Gaskell on matters of business. Now an interview with Mr. Champneys "on matters of business" meant at least an hour's work, at most an afternoon's.

Herrick thought awhile; then he looked at his watch. With the utmost despatch there was no saving a train from Wrexford for London before five in the afternoon.

So then, with a terrible misgiving as to what might be the consequences of this enforced delay, the young man beat down his burning impatience to be off—going—doing something somewhere—and forced himself to sit still for an hour and a half without a break, listening to the driest business details, and giving in return the most methodical of instructions.

As he crossed the hall on his way out of the house a sheet of paper lying on the floor caught his eye; it had evidently fluttered from a small portfolio which lay on a table, and which he recognised as his cousin's.

Mechanically he picked up the paper, intending to replace it; as he did so the pencil-sketch on it caught his eye. It was done with a bold, free touch, and represented the interior of a boudoir—his mother's was it? Yes; there was the old Earl's portrait over the mantelpiece, and the two full-length figures which faced each other, one either side of a table, were—good Heavens! who were they? That young man with his head thrown back and his fingers clenched into the palm of his hand was evidently meant for him, but it had his mother's face, crowned with its widow's cap, given to it! And that tall, stately lady, with her head thrown back and hand outstretched, was endowed with his own moustached visage, and hair cut "à la militaire." The words beneath the sketch, in Honor's big writing, "Which is which?" made it plain that the young lady possessed the gifts, doubly dangerous when conjoined, of caricaturist and satirist.

Herrick laid down the sketch, ashamed of himself for the feeling of annoyance which so trivial a matter had raised in his mind.

And had he been forced to speak out all his thoughts, he would have confessed that the real sting of the thing lay, not alone in the fact that a moment so tragic to him had been made material for a jest, but also in the vividness of the likeness between his mother and himself, which, with an artist's eye, the girl had seized and emphasized.

Why or wherefore, however, this should be a cause of annoyance to him, he might have found it hard to say.

#### ON IDLENESS.

THE copy-books tell us, in inimitable characters, that "Industry is the mother of all good things"; and that, on the



other hand, "Idleness is the prolific parent of sin."

Like the rest of my race, I revered the copy-book in my infancy, and scoff at it in the days of strength and wisdom after experience. Not that its laudable maxims troubled me much as a boy. One does not at that epoch of life engrave things of this kind upon the heart. I admired the elegant style in which they were written at the top of the page, and despaired of rivalling it. The fine coat of the maxim was what fascinated my affections. Translated into my own handwriting, there was nothing alluring about the phrase, be it what it might. What if the style was unattainable? The caligraphy of the copy-book is, in truth, to us in childhood what the ideal is to us as men. We may, or may not keep our eyes fixed upon the copper-plate writing while we urge our childish, inky fingers on their wild, erratic courses. We may, or may not seriously try to model our life's conduct on that—whether fanciful, or matter of history—of the ideal man who dwells within us, dimly or distinctly, in the summer-time of existence.

There is industry that profiteth not, and is, therefore, idle; even as there is idleness that does more for the body and mind of man than the best-directed and most untiring industry.

A good many of us are like rogues on the treadmill. We go round and round in our daily task—eat, drink, sleep, and name the new baby; and at the end of the year are pretty much where we were at the beginning. We are three hundred and sixty-five days older; that is about all. For the rest, our precious industry, although it has been unintermittent, has not done a great deal for us, beyond adding a few pounds to our savings, and digging another horizontal wrinkle in our forehead. We have developed like the caterpillar and the slug: not a whit better. At this rate, when we die we ought to be accomplished candidates for Nirvana, although we have done nothing but work, work all through the years.

There was once, we are told, a certain diminutive French Abbé, who, falling ill, was bidden by the doctor to drink a quart of barley-water every hour.

"Well," said the doctor, when he called to ascertain how the patient was thriving on this prescription, "what is the result?"

"There is none," replied the small Abbé.

"Have you taken it all?" enquired the doctor.

"I could not," was the pathetic answer.

Whereupon the doctor did not hide his displeasure. Indeed, the neglect seemed to him almost an insult.

"But, my friend," interposed the little Abbé, pleadingly, "how could you bid me swallow a quart an hour, when I hold but a pint?"

This little story will bear being applied to the subject of my paper. It were monstrous to expect the same measure of idleness and industry to serve all constitutions with equal benefit.

Some men work because they love work and hate play. They do not shine in society; they have no conversation; the fair sex are not passing fair to their distorted vision; the whitewashed ceiling of their office and its shabby fittings are more attractive to them than landscapes or Italian skies; and they are under the agreeable thrall of no diverting hobbies.

In Heaven's name, let such men work all through the day, if they like it. They accumulate immense fortunes; and even though they may be miserly in their lifetime, when they die some one benefits by their millions.

A man of this kind, on an enforced holiday, is a very compassionate object.

I remember one such, who, while driving through some of the most entrancing scenery of our land, on a fair summer day, hid his face behind a journal of the money market all the time. His doctor had told him he would kill himself if he did not take a change. He obeyed the letter of the injunction; but not the spirit. And he did really die a little while after of paralysis of the brain, or something of the kind, due to excessive industry.

Then there are the human butterflies of life, whose wings would lose their beauty, and who would be likely to retrograde back to worms, if they were condemned to give up their airy caperings in the sunlight, and to spend many hours of the day in the society of a ledger and a stool. Why should we part with these picturesque features of existence? What is it to you or me if they gain nothing by the sweat of their brows? They are like the plush curtains and gilded cornices of your room. You could do without them; but life would have less colour in losing them.

Let them, therefore, strut and sun themselves, twirl their young moustaches, play the tailor's dummy and the ladies' darling to their heart's content, and give them nothing of the world's work harder to do

than the carving of chickens' breasts. It is safe to affirm that, as a general rule, a man gravitates towards that for which he is best fitted. If these dainty moths are incapable of great things, is that a humane reason why they should be denied the right to coruscate in the sunbeams to the best of their ability?

I suppose the natural, undisciplined inclination of a man would impel him to be active and idle spasmodically: a vigorous spell of work being followed by a lengthy spell of coma. That was the fashion of the times when the noble savage had the forests and the plains to himself. He would hunt for twenty-four hours or more if his prey contrived to elude him; but he would make up for it by eating so much meat that he was afterwards obliged to keep to his bed, in a state of gorged repletion, for a corresponding number of hours. He was no better than an anaconda that has swallowed a panther, the digestion of which lies heavy upon it.

I very much doubt if one can recommend this course of action, or inaction, to the man of mind. To be sure, some say, when you have worked at book-writing or leading articles for two or three months, you ought, for your brain's sake, to take a month's holiday. It is a charming recipe for a literary man. He would, I warrant, like nothing better than to act upon it, were he not deterred by scruples. Of these scruples, not the least is the expensiveness of such a life. And, to my mind, one of the greatest is the hardships he would thereby put upon himself, in the series of reawakenings—as it were—of his talents, after each period of repose. There would be many a cruel yawn before his wits would run in harness as of yore, and many a revolt.

The literary life is an unnatural life. I do not mean that it is therefore intolerable. Oh dear, no; for we by no means live in a state of nature in A.D. 1890. But I do infer that it is always impolitic to suspend the working of functions which may be called artificial, unless it be an absolute necessity. A man writes better the more often he writes; or, at least, if he does not, he will speedily be disgraced. A certain literary character, I forget whom, being asked about the ratio of his work to the time spent upon it, said, that in the first hour of his day he wrote perhaps five lines; in the second, fifty; in the third, a hundred; the fourth, a hundred and fifty; and from

the fourth hour onwards, until he was obliged, reluctantly, to break the spell, he wrote as fast as his pen would go; and the longer he wrote, the faster ran his ideas. The beginning of our work is never pleasant; is often tormenting; and is sometimes diabolically hard. And so we prefer to keep pen, ink, paper, and brain in close alliance, month after month, working always—though, now more, and now less—instead of verifying that sweet tradition of perfect idleness, which so often comes insidiously to tempt us.

As a matter of fact, there is no such thing as absolute idleness. You cannot call a stone idle because it does not walk about. The laziest of men is never perfectly idle. That were death; and death is not idleness.

You might suppose that the torpor of the opium-eater was ideal idleness. But look, if you can, into the brain of Kin Can Poo, yonder Chinese reprobate on a shelf, who has drifted into a world of his own under the influence of the baneful drug. You will see activity enough there with a vengeance. His body is, to all intents and purposes, dead. But his soul is intensely alive.

Are the flowers in the garden-patch outside your window idle because they do not join stems and start a round dance, or form a company, and begin to spin or criticise the soil in which they have been planted? About as much as the little grey mist of gnats which, ever and anon, drifts by the window-pane, each gyrating round the other like a universe of solar systems.

If only we could sharpen our faculties sufficiently, it is at least possible that we should be much entertained by the vivacity of what we agree to call the members of the inanimate world. It would not surprise me to know that we should then hear a most humiliating echo, on all sides of us, of that ancient jeer: "Oh, what fools these mortals be!"

Some years ago—a good many, I am sorry to say—I underwent an examination at the hands of the Civil Service Commissioners, in company with ten or twelve youths, my contemporaries. Among other tiresome things, we were called upon to write an essay upon "Genius and Industry." My thesis in those days was that Industry was boy to the man Genius; in other words, that a man could become a genius by being industrious. I have changed my opinion since then. This, by the way, however. I refer to the ex-

perience because I was then particularly appalled by the brisk way in which a certain one of the candidates tackled his essay. He had not sat face to face with his subject for one minute ere his pen was galloping over the paper. Heaven preserve us! thought I: what a mind the fellow must have! And on he went, covering page after page, ere I, for one, had conceived anything that, even upon the excuse of parental partiality, I judged fit to be called an idea. Yet when the results came out, I found that I was credited with one hundred and eighty marks out of a possible two hundred, as compared with this industrious youth's eighty-five. I was idle, or seemed so, for twenty minutes; he was from the outset industrious as an ant.

My judgement upon this occasion was just like that of the world. If men see you bustling about, they think well of you. "Such a one," they say, "is a smart fellow. He will do well." Whereas poor Peter Meditation, who is plagued to death by the fervour and multitude of the fancies which struggle in his head like gladiators in an arena, and who lounges about with his hands in his pockets, looking at something a mile or two away, has his reputation blasted to a certainty.

It may be that such a one does do well; in which case the world is, of course, eager to declare that it prophesied the event. But its surprise is quite prodigious if Peter, while loafing around, has the luck to hit upon a new invention whereby some one — not Peter — either saves or gains a great deal of money. Who would have thought it, asks the world, from an idle oaf like Peter?

School-rooms see strange sights, and hear many unaccountable pieces of information. I would not again be a school-master for anything, unless I were assured ten times as much perception, intelligence, and patience as I happen to possess. For a short time I did, one year, play the pedagogue in a preparatory school. I will give you a definition of a preparatory school under modern auspices. It is an institution in which a certain number of select little boys, at a hundred or a hundred and fifty guineas each per annum, are fattened upon meat three times a day. The dear little fellows' pampered primeval passions thrive amazingly upon this treatment, and at the end of each term they go home with large stomachs, an inordinate amount of self-esteem, and a precocity in

naughtiness and the ways of the world that must sometimes astonish even their parents.

But it is because of the unparalleled responsibility of discernment that it asks of a man, that I would not again, unless under exceptional circumstances, take charge of the minds of little boys. How are you to know when you rebuke that lumpish, lymphatic lad, Porlockson, for his apparent inertia, that you are thereby pinching sensibility at the quick, nipping genius in the bud? He looks so very soft, and all the other boys do but laugh at him for a muff. And, on the other hand, is it not natural that you should be wheedled by that engaging boy, Sharp major, who always appears so intelligently attentive to your lectures? Anon, however, when they both enter the robust life of public school, Porlockson develops a most remarkable passion for chemistry, that makes him a wonder of the place; while Sharp major, having been convicted upon divers occasions of fraud, in the form of cribs and so forth, has at length to be expelled for a most flagrant breach of the eighth commandment.

Reflection upon all this would make me very chary of boxing boys' ears for dulness and stupidity, even if I were a village dominie in no dread of magisterial interference.

Was there not, once upon a time, a nation of savages who were wont to punish what they called idleness in any young man of the tribe, by chopping off his arms at the elbow? I believe I have read something of the kind. If such a nation ever existed, one might wonder why it has not climbed to the top of the tree in the race for pre-eminence among the peoples of the earth. But I, for my part, should be surprised if it had. Good Heavens! what an unpleasant society to be born into, willy nilly! Of course, however, one does not know in what their standard of idleness consisted. Did it include everything less energetic than violent exercise? Then the race, no doubt, became extinct from internal combustion in the course of half-a-dozen generations after the establishment of such a custom; and a good thing too. But, if otherwise, who drew the line between idleness and activity? Could not a comely lad, in the spring-time of life, saunter into the banana groves with his arm round the portly waist of a dusky maid except at the peril of his limbs from

the elbow downwards? Such tyrannous decrees were the death of love. It is, therefore, probable that the race wasted away as effectively as if all its members were devoted admirers of Schopenhauer and his opinion, that the world is so bad a sphere, that you really ought on no account to marry, and bring new-born little innocents into the midst of its trials and afflictions.

To my mind, there is no real idleness among us except misdirected effort. Of that there is, to be sure, any quantity. But it cannot be helped. It is as inevitable a prelude to successful effort as pain is to pleasure, or pleasure to pain. To eliminate it were like depriving the soul of that debased encumbrance, the body. It must be with us always; nor need it be censured inordinately, or vilified. Indeed, it gives much interest to life, the lack of which we should miss sadly. It may be a culpable confession; but I must admit that I work the better for seeing a knot of unoccupied men, or boys, or gossiping wives grouped on the village green in front of my house. It is the stimulant of contrast. On the other hand, my brain is paralysed in the midst of a great city like London or New York. The activity there is so bewildering, absorbing, and loud, that I cannot persuade myself that there is any need for me to join in the general energy. I prefer to thrust my hands into my pockets and wander aimlessly among all these busy-bodies, with a mind as dead within me as if I had leased my soul to some one else for a while.

This, I fancy, is the true estimate of idleness. It cannot be a reproach, because it is the necessary complement of activity.

#### NEW WIMBLEDON.

THE rifleman who forms the resolution of visiting New Wimbledon, will have the melancholy satisfaction of a glimpse of old Wimbledon on his way. Yonder rises the hill, coming into sight just after the train has steamed past the velvet lawns, where past or present masters and mistresses of the pleasant mysteries of lawn-tennis, are practising with ball and racquet. There is the hill, fringed with villas and gardens; and, in the distance, is still to be made out the tall flagstaff, about which once gathered all the pleasant sociability of camp and rifle range. Farewell,

old Wimbledon, where no more the white tents shall give hospitable welcome to all the world.

The train whirls on, through a pleasant country, with fields in the fresh green of the coming crops, hedgerows and plantations getting on their summer livery, and groups of houses, which, like pools on the level sands, announce the approaching tide of great London's increase. Then the wooded slopes of Esher and Claremont come into sight, with Sandown, pleasantest of race-courses, spread out in full view, its stands and balconies all empty now, and the grassy turf, smooth as a bowling green, stretched out below. On the other side, the silent Mole worms its course through lush meadows towards the Thames. At Weybridge, we come to sandy heaths, and pine barrens, and the line is cut through great banks of the whitest and finest of drifted sands; and then we are presently at Woking station, where the once Dramatic College is replaced by what looks like a London suburb. Beyond, rise the gloomy towers of the great prison—now the silent abode of hundreds of unhappy women, but soon, we are told, to be converted into a military barracks. Nor is the tall ventilating shaft of the County Asylum, a little further on, a vastly cheerful sight.

Brookwood comes next, where the white tombs of the city of the dead are scattered among shrubberies and grassy lawns; and a silent train sweeps gloomily towards us, bearing back its load of mourners, leaving their dead to their last, long sleep.

And Brookwood, for the present, is the station for New Wimbledon, though the navvies are busy upon the little branch line, which is presently to take everybody to the heart of the Volunteer camp. There is no need to ask the way. The white tents gleam on yonder hill, and here is the good old Basingstoke Canal, its banks all frilled and fringed with luxuriant growth, and the track of its towpath almost lost in verdure. It has borne us company, indeed, for some little distance along the railway, and just now we passed a pleasant wood, the fresh, green canopy of which was reflected in the still waters—a wood which, great boards informed us, was practicable for building purposes, and which bears the suggestive names of the Hermitage Wood, and Folk's Orchard. The original hermit was a brother from Guildford Friary, who founded here a house of



retreat — and this Hermitage still exists in the form of a pleasant country mansion, of which the days of seclusion are rapidly drawing to a close.

A pretty, high-arched bridge carries one fork of the road over the canal, where there is a lock, cool and tranquil, the water plashing freely through the black and weathered sluices; while, beyond, an old barge seems to have taken root there, and grown to its moorings. Yet its days of rest are numbered, for the railway men are at work a little further on, and trucks and railway waggons are rumbling over the new bridge.

The high railway embankment, which runs the length of the valley, seems to divide the country into two different regions. On this side the dark and heath-covered hills rise gently towards the new camp. On the other side one does not know what there is; but the sweet jingle of church bells falls melodiously on the ear, as if inviting to a brighter, softer country beyond. And a tall brick viaduct opens the way beneath the railway bank, upon which trains are bustling along to or from Farnham and Aldershot. And that way all the traffic goes, the one-horse shay, the briskly-driven tradesmen's carts, the hansom cab, that intrepid pioneer of civilisation, and the family carriage, with the fat, sleek horses.

Well, the country beyond the arch is still heath and common, but the well-frequented road leads to a scattered village, Pirbright by name, while at some distance apart, stands the church, from the tower of which the bells are sounding their pleasant chimes. A breezy, furzy country stretches out in the direction of Guildford, and there is Worplesdon on the way, with handsome church and roadside inn, and village green, all retired from the world, in pleasant, country quietude.

But our way is quite in another direction. Over the quaint little canal bridge, and by a path that strikes across the heather, with plashy little patches here and there, where the dark waters of some tiny rill filter through moss and lichen, in many a treacherous little swamp. The scene is wild and a little forbidding; but on reaching the brow of the first rise, the union jack fluttering from its staff, and the white tents of the Red Cross knights below, give a little life to the scene. And over in the valley yonder rise more white tents, a good-sized camp, indeed, where seven hundred or more of the regulars from

Aldershot are lying under canvas. And there targets are set up against the hill-side, and the rattle of a pretty constant fire of rifles comes echoing up the hills, mingled with bugle calls, and marked at intervals by the gruff bark of a big gun, somewhere among the distant heaths.

And here, close at hand, under the Red Cross, is the field-hospital of the force, where, happily, casualties are as yet unknown. But New Wimbledon is further still, up by the Engineers' camp, which crowns the more distant ridge. Yes, it is a wild waste country this, with black and moorish wastes stretching into the distance, yet with green patches here and there, and gradually in course of reclamation, with hedgerows and green fields invading the borders of the waste. And a wild, windy place it must be in winter!

"You may well say that," remarks a red-coated Engineer, who is making tracks across the heath. "And we ought to know, for we've been camped here all the winter. And of all the queer pitches give me Bisley Common. Salisbury Plain isn't a patch upon it, nor yet Dartmoor."

But coming to the Engineers' camp, the result of all their plans and measurements is evident in the great earthworks that stretch across the black, heathy plain. A wide plateau, almost level, extends in front of these butts; and in winter it is spongy enough, no doubt; but the ground is fast drying up, and where the heath comes to be worn away, there will be a little dust, perhaps. But it is a capital range, after all, with plenty of room for expansion; and there does not seem to be any prospect of the march of building speculations driving the Association from its quarters, as the Red Man is driven from his to seek fresh hunting-grounds in wilder regions.

From the level of the dark plain, which is terminated by the butts, rises a knoll of greener hue, and surrounded by a belt of land, which has been partly reclaimed from the wilderness; and on the summit of the knoll stands the building, it seems to be the identical building, formerly at old Wimbledon, which forms the headquarters of the Volunteer camp. From this knoll there is a noble view all round the horizon. The Chobham ridges close the view towards Aldershot and Farnham; and then the Hog's Back carries on the line, its regular outline giving the curious

chalk-ridge the appearance of some gigantic artificial earthwork. The ridge breaks away, showing where the river Wey cuts through the hilly barrier at Guildford, and then we see the heights that are crowned by Saint Martha's lonely chapel; and so on to the imposing crest of Boxhill, and the rolling downs above Leatherhead and Epsom. There is a haze over the Thames valley, and on that side nothing is distinctly to be made out; but the wide horizon is continued all round the compass, till we return to our Chobham Ridges, and the muttons that feed thereon.

The air, too, corresponds with the freedom of the prospect, fresh, pure, and invigorating. Nor is the scene any longer dark and lowering, for the sun shines out, and the cloud masses are piled in snowy heights in the bright blue sky; grass, and moss, and freshly-springing heather also catch the radiance, and the underlying blackness is hidden from view. It is a picture of peace and war. Yonder are the clustered tents of the soldiers, and the rattle of musketry and the boom of cannon are in the air, with the sounds of military music. But here the larks are warbling, the peewits drive past with shrill cries, and all round the cuckoo repeats his note—as, indeed, is to be expected. For,

In May, he sings all day.

A little below, the big pavilion of the refreshment contractors takes its stand, with fragmentary announcements here and there of refreshing drinks, not, alas, as yet available; and scattered about are the portable properties of the old Wimbledon camp, the tram waggons that rolled from point to point, and that will, no doubt, perform the same duties here, with wooden huts and a crowd of miscellaneous objects, all redolent of old Wimbledon. Close to headquarters, the platform of the future New Wimbledon station is already completed, and the line, still all in the rough, can be traced sweeping down, with a cutting here and there, into the valley below.

As to Bisley itself, which gives its name to heath and common hereabouts, it lies some mile and a half further away. No, there is nothing remarkable at Bisley, which consists of a few scattered houses, and an ancient church, near which is a mineral spring, which once had a reputation, and is known as St. John's Well. No very remarkable people seem to have lived there, or to have died there, and had monuments erected to their memory. It

belonged to the Zouche family once, who obtained important grants from the Crown of manors and lands in this neighbourhood, at the time of the Reformation. Yet the place had a narrow escape of being the retreat of a once celebrated, if not illustrious, character. Barbara, Duchess of Cleveland, received the grant of the reversion of the manor, which the Zouches held only by a life tenancy, at the hands of her Royal lover. This was in 1671, when Barbara was in the heyday of her charms and favour. But her Royal lover died; his line was driven from the house. Other monarchs came who knew not Barbara; but still she held on to her chance of Bisley, and got it at last, when she was old, and fat, and neglected. That was in 1708, and she only lived to the next year; and if she ever came to Bisley she did not stay there long.

Beyond lies Chobham, as quiet and secluded a village as can be imagined, where there is an interesting church, with some quaint features. The Gordon Boys' Home is not far distant, in the neighbourhood of which are traces still to be found of that camp at Chobham—almost prehistoric now—which was the precursor of our modern camps of instruction, and about which John Leech and the wits of "Punch" poked good-natured fun, in the early Mark Lemon era, before the Crimean War. And that was when "Brown Bess" was the chosen arm of the British troops, percussion locks a quite modern innovation, and when the recruits' front teeth were specially examined with reference to their use in biting off the ends of cart-ridges. Further in that direction is Bagshot, with its heath once famed for highwaymen; and Frimley and Sandhurst are not far to seek on the other side of those formidable Chobham ridges.

While we have been gazing the workmen have knocked off for dinner, and the quietude of the military quarters indicates that a similar occupation is there in progress. And this is a fitting opportunity to visit the butts themselves, involving a lonely walk across the wild and blasted heath, where a gibbet would be an appropriate ornament, or which might be a fit rendezvous for the witches in "Macbeth." The great earthbank looms high and formidable now, with a lower bank in front, behind which are screened the brick huts of the markers, all solid and well constructed. And over there, leaning against the bright red wall of a

store, or magazine, are the targets of the future, enjoying a fresh coat of white paint—targets which will decide the fate of many a gallant struggle, and whose bulls and magpies will be the totems of the successful competitor for the Queen's guineas, and the rifle championship of the year.

It is curious to note, too, that although we seem to have climbed a good many hills, we have reached a not much higher level than the top of the railway embankment, for turning that way a train can be seen, apparently skimming along the edge of the heath, although a good mile and a half away.

But the tents of the Volunteer camp will lie rather higher than this, about the central knoll of headquarters, where the fields have a gentle slope towards the zone of the rifle ranges, and presently the scene will be busy and gay enough, with, let us hope, much of the gaiety and charm of old Wimbledon. There is plenty of scope for ornamental gardening here; but amateurs must be prepared to bring their own mould with them, unless they are able to break up and remove an intractable crust of hard-bake, on which nothing will grow but heaths and mosses. But beneath this is a light, but excellent sandy soil, in which shrubs and flowers flourish famously.

Perhaps some—who are quartered in the Camp, and whose eyes may grow a little tired of the wild and shaggy country of heath and ridge—may pay a flying visit to the rich meadow-land and shaded tortuous lanes that lie about the banks of the old river Wey. The best introduction to this country is from Woking station. Woking, itself, is a dull, featureless village, although the church has some good points about it. But, from Woking station, the road leads pretty directly southwards, to a long, winding lane, called, appropriately enough, White Rose Lane.

Whether the name is as ancient as those early Plantagenets, or later Tudors, to whose ancient home it leads, it would be difficult to say; but it would be vain now to ask for the Palace. The Royal mansion has long since disappeared, and its materials have been utilised in a handsome, substantial, old house known as Park Farm, the way to which lies across Hoe Bridge; but the moats and foundations of the old Royal residence can still be traced, and its memory is preserved in Old Hall Barn and Old Hall Copse, which are close to the modern farm buildings. It is a pleasant, secluded spot, enfolded by the softly-flowing stream.

In the time of Edward the Third, this moated manor house was occupied by Edward of Woodstock, the King's sixth son, one branch of whose line of descendants, ever marked by persistent misfortune, was extinguished by Henry the Eighth in the person of that great Duke who speaks to us through Shakespeare:

When I came hither I was Lord High Constable  
And Duke of Buckingham; now, poor Edward  
Bohun.

Again, we find Woking Manor in the possession of Margaret Beaufort, who had espoused, in second nuptials, a younger brother of the house. And Margaret, the mother of the Tudors and the founder of their high fortunes, transmitted Woking, with other vast possessions, to her grandson, Henry the Eighth, who was a frequent visitor here in the early part of his reign. He was here in 1515 with the Archbishop of York; and here was brought a missive from the Court of the Roman Pontiff, announcing that the Archbishop had been chosen Cardinal. And henceforth he was to be known as Cardinal Wolsey.

It was a rich manor, too, in those earlier days, and among the dues that were paid to its Plantagenet lord, were seventy cocks and hens at Christmas, valued at three halfpence each, and one pound of pepper, valued at one shilling. The pepper tribute is singular and original, and excites speculation. What connection had Woking with the Spice Islands, and how could such a service have originated? Was it some Crusader who brought home a supply from the East of the useful condiment, or some palmer from the Holy Land who set up a grocery store in his native village?

A little lower down this—which is the old course of the Wey—we come upon Newark Abbey and the ruins of the old Abbey church, lying among streams and water-courses, with effects of water and foliage such as artists delight in. But in wet weather there is sometimes too much water, and the lanes may be found submerged knee-deep. Out of the maze of lanes and water-courses, Pirford Church shows here and there as a guiding mark; and an interesting old church it will prove to the antiquarian. And Ripley is the Rome of the district, whither all the sign-posts point—Ripley, pleasantest of English villages, whose extensive green is believed to head the record of village greens, and where, as everybody knows who has ever been a cyclist, there is good accommodation for man and beast.

## UNDER WHAT LEADING ?

## A MYSTERY.

## CHAPTER II.

COUNTRY people are very apt to suppose that neither spring nor summer is of much account in London. There could not be a greater mistake. Why, the flower-vendors' carts are a spring in themselves, and rival any massed, bedded-out blossoms in any gentleman's garden, however well tended. Like gorgeously-coloured butterflies, awakened from their winter sleep, they glide about the streets, nodding their plumed heads and dazzling blossoms in the balmy breeze.

Oh yes! it is balmy enough, even in the Crescent, and as to the row of young linden trees that stand, each in a little sentry-box of its own, all round our curve of pathway and road, they put on their spring dress of tender green, with tiny tufts by way of tassels, just as jauntily as your country trees, every bit.

There are other changes, too, that mark the spring-time for sister Janet and myself. We take out the velvet linings of our Leghorn bonnets, remove the bows to match upon the crowns, and substitute silk or satin instead. Once these changes are made, we always feel that the winter is past, and any little renewal of sleet or frost is a sort of accident. The marigolds keep pace with us, and begin to put forth tiny, round, hard buttons here and there among their fluffy leaves, to show that orange-coloured flowers are on the way; while the tawny wall-flowers follow suit.

In the year of which I am writing we had what is called an "early spring." By notes in our respective diaries for the former years, we found that fully a fortnight, if not more, difference lay between the changing of our bonnet-trimmings in the two consecutive years.

I had just remarked upon this fact, and Janet had retorted that certainly the biting east wind of that particular afternoon made our proceedings seem rather ironical. The kettle was singing on the hob; the light was fading. It had chanced to be an "off" afternoon of mine, and we had had a busy time of it stitching and unpicking.

"The winter is past and gone, and the flowers are come again upon the earth," said I, with a glance at the two bonnets that now reposed upon a side table; not in

the least applying the text in question to them, but still feeling that they made a very tolerable show.

"Yes," said sister Janet, giving the kettle a touch, since it seemed rather inclined to tilt upon its nose; "the years run by very quickly in quiet lives like ours. I suppose each one is so like the others that it is hard to distinguish them."

"This has seemed somehow different," I hazarded, a certain shy feeling coming over me as I spoke.

"Ah, yes," said sister Janet, "they have been here nearly a year now," and she waved her knitting pin towards Mrs. Ruthven's side of the Crescent.

"Eight months and a fortnight," I put in, laconically.

"What an accurate mind you have, sister Annie," replied my companion, "I could not have told the exact time."

A certain guilty feeling came upon me. Sister Janet was not of a jealous disposition, but if she only knew how all my heart seemed drawn out of me towards that lonely woman next door; if she only knew the passion of sympathy that had grown up within me, stirring my life to its depths as the angel troubled the pool in the olden time; if she only knew the wonderment, the dreamings, the forebodings that filled my waking hours, the way in which, with all my soul in my ears, I used to strain and listen for sounds in the next house, in the room that was only divided from mine by a shallow wall, and yet might as well have been a hundred miles away for all that I could read of the secrets it buried—what then would sister Janet have said?

If ever you feel drawn to some one who is a stranger to you in this irresistible manner, be sure it is Heaven's way of telling you that you are wanted to do something for them; that some hour is coming in which your hand is destined to clasp theirs, your arm to uphold and strengthen, your sympathy to console and sustain them. I know this now; I did not know it then. I felt the influence about me and around me, but I did not know the why or the wherefore of it. I was led blindly towards I knew not what. My whole life, in some strange sort, seemed changed and renewed. Its passionless calm was stirred. A passing glance at the fair-haired boy, a sight of the pale, stately mother at the window—such trifles as these marked a day as with a white stone; sent me thrilling and trembling on my way;



kept me waking and wondering in the silent hours of the night. Thus had it been with me through the long winter. But the days that were so short, and the nights that were so long, had brought me no new knowledge. Sometimes the boy would disappear for days together. Then the window was seldom without a watcher, or we would see Mrs. Ruthven set out in the morning, and only return as the dusk was falling, like a grey veil over the Crescent; a grey veil pierced here and there by the shimmer of a star showing bright in the frosty air.

"There is a great crush of business on just now," would sister Janet say, at such times; then perk her head, and pucker up her mouth. "They are killing that young fellow, whoever they are," she would say, indignantly.

Something was evidently wearing him out strangely; for, when we did see him, he would look wan and worn, his eyes deeper and darker than ever, his cheek pale, his temples hollow.

"Life in these days is a perfect Juggernaut!" sister Janet would say, still full of righteous indignation.

I used to say nothing.

Queer fancies would come over me—wicked fancies, maybe; and the echo of a footstep that oftentimes paced the floor until the church behind the Crescent chimed the small hours of the morning, seemed to trample on my heart, crushing it.

But all this was in the winter. And was I not writing of balmy spring? Had we not been putting spring linings in our bonnets? And was not Amelia about to bring in the tea? I say "about," because I am not sure that tea was ever brought in at all.

Sister Janet had moved to the window, and was about to pull down the striped chintz blind, when she gave a sharp sort of cry that brought me to her side in a moment. There, out in the grey dusk, was the tall, dark figure of Mrs. Ruthven. She was standing by—no, clinging to—the gate at the end of the narrow, flagged pathway that led from the road to the porch.

"Go to her! Go to her!" cried sister Janet, wringing her hands one in the other.

But I seemed rooted to the spot. It was as if something I had long expected had, at last, come to pass. Then, while I hesitated, benumbed, as it were, by the intensity of my own feelings, we saw her

move slowly and painfully up the pathway, reach the bottom step, and then sink down, a dark heap, against the white stones.

It seemed but a moment before I was by her side, had rung a frantic peal at the house-bell, had raised the fallen head upon my lap, and was sobbing over the death-pale face that was nigh as white as the widow's cap that clipt it round. A strange way, truly, to be going on about a complete stranger to me; and yet a way over which I had no control. That wondrous feeling we are all conscious of at times—the conviction that the thing that moves us has all happened before—was powerfully impressed upon me. I felt no astonishment when a gaunt woman, with a face like a hatchet, bent over the two of us, lifted Mrs. Ruthven as easily as though she had been a child, and muttering to herself, "It's the old story, the old story, all the time," half led, half carried the poor lady into the house, and, in the twinkling of an eye, had her laid on a shabby lounge that stood behind the parlour door; had her bonnet off, the neck and bosom of her dress unfastened; jerked herself out of the room, and jerked herself in again with some water and a sponge, and began to moisten the marble brow and pallid cheek of her mistress.

A prompt and unsentimental person, certainly, and one more given to deeds than words.

So at last I was within the walls of the house upon which I had cast so many longing glances. With one look round, I took every detail in—books, books, books, in rows one above another; the shelves of plainest deal, their freight evidently a precious one. By the window—so placed that the light fell full upon it—was a small table, holding a tin case of water-colours, a stand of brushes, a large magnifying-glass, and a high pile of cabinet photographs.

"That is how it is I see her sitting in the window so often; she is trying to eke out their small income in any way she can."

A mist came over my eyes at this, blurring the white face upon the pillow to my sight. I held the hand that lay in mine closer. I had fancied, wondered, wearied. Now I was to know, at least, something of the life that had grown so dear to me, yet had been as some beautiful veiled statue to my eyes.

With a deep sigh, as of one obliged to

return to life, yet wearied of its burden, Mrs. Ruthven opened her eyes. They rested on me long and questioningly, entirely without wonder at my presence, and not at all as though she looked upon a stranger.

"How kind and good you look!" she said, at last. Then she added: "I have often thought so. I am glad you have come, very glad."

"So am I glad to be here."

I tried to speak quietly and restrainedly; but my lips quivered, and the tears rose in spite of me.

"Do not be so sorry for me," she answered, with a pitiful little smile. "There is nothing very much the matter, after all. Long walks always take it out of me, and I went quite too far to-day, didn't I, Hannah?"

Hannah growled out something within herself, of which I could only catch the last words: "Miles and miles too far."

A faint blush rose to Mrs. Ruthven's cheek.

"I am much better now," she said, rising from the couch, and standing, tall and pale, before me. "A-h! My lockets!"

It had fallen at her feet, and flown open with the force of the fall. Little women have some advantages in life; one is that they can stoop quickly and easily. I raised the locket in an instant, and there it lay open on the palm of my hand, showing me the face of an angel—a child of some five years, with the most pathetic eyes, the bonniest curls, the sweetest, smiling mouth.

"It is—your son?" I said, timidly, as she took it from me.

"Yes," she said, "my boy Malcombe—many years ago. He is now quite a young man, as you have seen, I doubt not. Most people notice Malcombe"—this with a fitful smile—"but he is not much at home just now; his time is his own. Young men have to work very hard in these days, if they mean to make their way."

She had turned away from me, and was slightly moving the photographs on the table by the window; while, to my extreme consternation, the hatchet-faced one was making wonderful grimaces and gestures at me from the open door. Unfortunately for her, there was a small mirror in an angle of the window, and with one glance at its surface, Mrs. Ruthven took in the state of affairs.

"It was so kind of you to come—but, I must not keep you now. I am nearly well again——"

The "climbing sorrow" of poor old Lear seemed ready to choke me. Had I only gained the coveted citadel to be expelled? Was this to be my first and last visit to Mrs. Ruthven? Were weeks and months of watching and waiting to count for nothing?

I felt myself dismissed—and yet it was so hard to go.

I felt that the eye of hatchet-face was upon me, and an encouraging eagerness in its glitter.

"I may come again, may I not?" I began bravely enough; then, as Mrs. Ruthven looked me gravely and silently in the face, I stammered, lamely enough, "just to ask for you, just to let my sister, —who is so anxious about you—know how you are——"

A sudden sweet smile stirred the pale, beautiful lips. Mrs. Ruthven laid her hand a moment on my shoulder: "Yes," she said, "come and see me again, come some morning; I'm sure we like the same books—we can talk them over——" A pretty gesture of the slim, white hand dismissed me; and I turned to go—but I was beckoned back. "You have been so good to me, she said, "so good and kind—— Thank you—my dear——"

I seemed to be in a kind of maze all the rest of that day. I found myself turning an almost deaf ear to sister Janet's comments upon the fact that, in her alarm, she had come out into the garden without putting on her cross-over; and her fears as to the ultimate results. Each time this subject was touched upon, Amelia ejaculated—"Lor, m'em!" lifting hands and eyes; but all enthusiasm seemed dead in me, all earnestness absorbed in the house next door. Every echo of sound I could catch set my nerves a-quiver. I seemed part and parcel of a pale-faced, weary-eyed woman's life and sorrows. What was the secret of the mother's sorrow? Why, oh, why! was the dark-eyed, golden-haired boy so seldom seen? Why was the tea so temptingly set out; the room made to look its poor best—and all in vain? Why did I hear such heavy, lagging footsteps, making faltering way up the steep stairs, at hours when all the world was sleeping? Was it fancy, or did I hear, and that more than once, a low, wailing cry, a lamentation, bitter and prolonged?

The Crescent was a common-place neighbourhood enough; yet, within the walls of one of its unpretending houses, a tragedy was being enacted, a pitiful drama, dragging its weary length—a human heart, passionate, loving, faithful, was slowly breaking.

It will be seen by all this that I shrank from again visiting Mrs. Ruthven, unasked. It would be difficult to say why, unless it was that the remembrance of some fancied reserve of manner on her part held me back. Almost daily I saw her sitting in the window, bending over her painting. Many times and oft I saw her watching for "golden locks," as sister Janet used to call the boy. Many nights I noticed the patch of light upon the narrow, sloping lawn; often I had put my own gas out, and the patch of light, that told me she kept vigil, was shining still. But the longing to see her nearer, and to hold speech with her, was burning within me; and I have great faith in longing bringing forth opportunity.

One morning, as I passed, she beckoned to me. For a moment I thought I might be mistaken, but the gesture was repeated, and a moment later she had opened the door herself, and stood waiting me. I hardly know how the time passed. Mrs. Ruthven was one of those people, one meets with sometimes, whose companionship has a charm that sets time at defiance. We talked of books, of work, of art—of anything in fact, except her boy. We neared the subject once or twice, but she glanced off from it. Yet I am very sure that he was present in both our thoughts. Many times I saw her finger the locket that hung upon her breast, and I knew—I knew—

I could not help expressing my astonishment at the amount and variety of her reading. "Yes," she said, feverishly, "I am never unoccupied, I am always busy. I like books that claim one's whole thought and attention, that must be thought about, if they are to be understood. Then there is my painting. Oh! I could not bear to be idle, I should go mad; constant occupation, that is the only thing—"

Then she stopped suddenly.

Shortly after this, I left her—but only to return the next day, and the next, and the next after that. In spite of the sorrow that I always felt underlay everything, I can look back upon it now, and say it was a happy time. The companionship of

a rarely beautiful and highly cultured mind must always be that.

Then there came a terrible episode.

Going over to see Mrs. Ruthven one day about noon, I found the house-door unlatched, and—an indiscretion perhaps on my part—pushed it gently open and went in. I knew that my friend had grown to be glad of my comings. I loved to see the quick, sweet smile of welcome that was ever her greeting to me. I went along the lobby, and reached the threshold of the parlour door, which stood half open. There my feet seemed to become rooted to the floor; I longed to retreat the way that I had come, yet felt powerless to move.

Mrs. Ruthven was seated in a low chair, by the fireplace. On his knees beside her, thrown in all the abandonment of sorrow on her breast, her arms encircling him, her tears streaming down upon his upturned face, was the boy Malcombe. Bright have I called him—beautiful to look upon? Ah, whither had brightness and beauty fled now? His eyes were sunken and dull, his cheeks haggard and colourless; even the curly locks that lay against his mother's shoulder seemed to have lost their gloss.

His arms were round her neck; he sobbed as he spoke.

"You are the only one who never fails me—the only one—the only one!"

"My darling—my darling," she answered, and oh, the anguish in her voice! "I could never change to you; you are always the same to me, so dear—so dear! A mother's love is like Heaven's love, it knows no variableness, neither shadow of turning; only come back to me, only think of the father who was so proud of you."

What business had I listening to the outpourings of a love like this?

With a vague idea of the hatchet-faced one making extraordinary gestures at the top of the kitchen stairs, I passed rapidly out into the sunshine, blinded to its brightness by the tears that flooded my eyes.

I spent a restless, miserable day, a restless, dreamful night. The memory of that night, now long ago, when I saw the fair face of Malcombe Ruthven all flushed and reckless, the lovely eyes wild and blood-shot, kept coming up before me like a vision. Yes; I knew now that it was the widow's son, the dearly-loved boy of whom the father had been once "so proud," who was the centre of that crew gathered about the glittering palace of sin, where the four roads met. I longed to see Mrs.

Ruthven again, yet shrank from the ordeal. At last I summoned up courage to venture.

I found her calm, happy, smiling, in most complete ignorance, evidently, of my having been an unwilling witness of her anguish on the previous morning.

"Fancy," she said, "Malcombe is coming home early to-night. He and I are going to have one of those cosy teas he is so fond of, with all sorts of good things that Hannah knows how to make. Business is slacker just now, and the boy can get away. It makes me very jealous, sometimes, that they keep him from me so much; but young men must work hard in these days, and one ought not to grumble."

Her hands trembled as she arranged some roses and a few delicate sprays of grasses in a tall glass, to be the central object of her little festival. Her face was all aglow, the lips tremulous, and a dewy brightness in the full, dark eyes. No girl, expectant of her lover's coming, was ever half so gay or glad.

It was a piteous sight. I could hardly keep myself in hand; but Hannah, coming in and out, had a stony face that betrayed nothing.

We heard the boy come home, sister Janet and I. We heard his sweet, ringing laugh through the window that was set open, because the autumn evening was as one dropped by summer, and left carelessly behind. The air was soft as velvet. Sister Janet had tea without her cross-over, and we only burned the very smallest fire imaginable—a very baby of a fire. We could catch the ring of voices from next door; jests and merriment were evidently the order of the day. Then came a song, a pretty, simple melody, in which the boy's tenor, and the mother's soft contralto, mingled lovingly. What a happy time it was. How sweet, and, ah me, how short-lived!

After this the old life set in as before. Long, lonely evenings—Mrs. Ruthven never asked me to be with her in the evenings, those were consecrated to Malcombe, or to watching for him, or to walks that lasted for hours, and from which my neighbour came in weary and worn, and over which Hannah shook her head.

"They are keeping that young fellow hard at it, again; they will kill him," sister Janet would say, indignantly.

I made no answer.

Deep down in my heart was dark and

dire foreboding. If it is true, as they say, that a chill shudder tells you some one walks across your grave, then must my destined tomb have lain across a turnpike road.

My outward, daily life went on in the same commonplace way as before. "One, two, three, and four" had to be counted over and over again, as clumsy fingers tumbled over one another, and tripped one another up on the keys; and yet how changed was I in all that lay beneath the surface.

I was conscious, more and more vividly conscious, of being in a state of waiting and of expectation; conscious of all life's pulses beating haltingly and heavily, because of something that was coming, though I knew not what.

It was later than usual, it was darker than usual, and I was returning homewards hurriedly, fearing that sister Janet might be getting anxious.

All at once, at the turn of a street, I stood still, uttered a low cry which it was fortunate no one heard, and hastened forward to meet—Mrs. Ruthven.

"You here?" I said, as we came face to face, and I held out my hand. She passed me by, not rudely, but as though she were unconscious of my presence.

"It has come," I thought to myself.

I cannot tell you why I thought this. Indeed, I did not think it. I knew.

The tall figure, with the simple black dress, and long black veil, passed on. I noticed more than one step aside to let her pass; more than one turn and gaze after her.

What wonder? The death-white face, the great, dark eyes, misty, and unseeing, fixed, as those of a sleep-walker—all this I had seen as she passed me.

I followed, overtook her, pressed to her side, took her hand and held it with gentle force. We were just beneath a lamp, and the light shone full upon my face.

For a moment hers changed. A faint smile touched her lips, her eyes looked as if they saw.

"Ah!" she said; "it is you. You are always good and kind. You are coming with me? But we are losing time; we must not do that."

She paced rapidly on, I with her, my arm close in hers. I soon realised that it was only when I spoke to her that she seemed conscious of my nearness. Some-



thing in the set, white agony of her face held me silent.

How long, how long did we pace those unfamiliar streets! How far did we wander I knew not whither! Yet in my companion seemed no indecision, no hesitation, no wavering.

As if led by some unseen hand, she went on, on with relentless purpose, apparently blind to the wondering looks bestowed upon us by those around us.

"Where are we going to, dear?" I ventured to say at last.

She ignored my question; answering to her own thoughts, not to my words.

"I am so glad to have you with me; you are always good to me. I have felt your sympathy near me and around me—even in the dead of night. I knew something was helping me, and making me strong, long before I knew what it was. God is very good."

She could say this—and her life what it was—one long heart-break, one long, weary watching.

On we paced, the streets we traversed growing narrower and more squalid. Here and there we passed groups of men and women, drunken and dissolute; the men bleary-eyed and sodden-looking, the women painted and haggard. Yet somehow they hushed their laughter, and the ribald jest was silenced as we passed.

In the midst of this labyrinth of streets, full of gaslight and noise, we crossed the mouth of a little "cul-de-sac," and here, gathered about a street singer, was a better kind of crowd. The woman had a child in her arms, and her voice was thin and wiry, yet not without pathos. What she sang was this:

Some are gone from us for ever,  
Longer here they might not stay;  
They have reached a fairer region  
Far away—far away.

I saw a change pass over Mrs. Ruthven's face. Her lips quivered, and she passed her hand across her brow. That sad refrain seemed to pursue us, "Far away—far away!" Long after we could no longer hear the words of the rest, that cry rose above the stir of many feet, and the distant murmur of the great city, "Far away—far away." Suddenly Mrs. Ruthven gripped my arm close, and turned towards me.

"I have made an idol of my boy—an idol; do you hear? But do not be hard upon me. I have never—had—anything else."

When I come to look back upon this strange episode in my life, I recognise that this was the one only hint I ever had of what had been the life of the woman whom I loved with a passionate tenderness, and knew for so short a time. As I listened to her words, as I met the sad, pathetic, far-off gaze of her dear eyes, my own grew dim, while the lamps all became blurred and dazzled, like so many watery moons. Yet no fear that I should stumble. My companion led me on too firmly for that. It was a long, long while since I had walked so far, or so fast; yet my limbs knew no weariness. I was as one under a spell, lifted out of common life by an experience beyond all precedent.

When and where would this journey of ours end? What was our ultimate destination? Under what leading was this strange companion of mine acting in so strange a manner? That she was under some exceptional and imperative influence I could not doubt. But here my inventive faculty failed me. I could but grope blindly.

"Have you ever been this way before?" I ventured, timidly.

She turned upon me with a gentle sort of pity.

"Only in a dream," she said, and I felt a shudder shake her whole frame, "only in a dream."

By this time we had got into a neighbourhood in which I instinctively felt no lady had any business to be at all. Each moment I feared some open insult would be offered to us. Once, as three half-tipsy fellows reeled round a corner, singing and shouting, my heart gave a heavy thud of fear; but, strange to say, they swung aside to let us pass, one standing, or rather swaying, in the roadway, to stare after my companion with a sort of maudlin awe and wonder.

On, still on, the same white-stricken face by my side; the same misty, unseeing-looking eyes gazing straight ahead; the same untiring footsteps hurrying to—I knew not what goal—what ghastly tryst—what terrible bourn—

Suddenly her hand grasped mine with a painful pressure—she drew her breath heavily—and, thus linked together, we turned down a side street; a street dotted here and there with groups of shabby, flaunting women, and shabby, dissipated men; a street which at any other time, I should have shrunk with every nerve in my body from entering, but which now

seemed as but a natural part and phase of a dream.

Half-way down this street Mrs. Ruthven stood a moment irresolute; then rapidly broke away from me, crossing to where, round about a doorway, a crowd talked and gesticulated, and at which a policeman stood on guard.

Again, I was conscious of the strange influence possessed by my companion. This way and that, the eager and excited people fell back to let her pass, I following on her heels.

"You can't pass in, m'arm," said the policeman, as she reached his side; "there's been an accident in this here house—a bad 'un too—a young fellow's been and shot himself dead——"

"It is my son!" she answered, with an indescribable gesture of dignity and anguish, while a confused murmur of pity and horror rose from the crowd behind.

It appeared to me that the man let her pass, in spite of himself—I following closely. Then he turned to face the excited people, who shoved and crushed, and tried to look over his shoulders and under his arms, after the manner of a London crowd.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Ruthven mounted a narrow stairway. From above several people craned their necks to stare at her. From below some looked up. On the landing stood a tall, handsome young fellow, whose dress betrayed him to belong to what are called the "better classes." He shrank back against the corner of the wall, turning his face aside, and making as though he would go down when we had passed.

But Mrs. Ruthven had her hand upon his arm in a trice.

"So you are here," she said, speaking in a dead, even voice that made one shudder to hear. "You are here to look upon your work, for it is yours, as you know. I am glad that you are here—I am glad to meet you. There is something that I want to say to you. You have triumphed, you have taken him from me. All my life I shall go mourning for him. All my life will be empty for lack of him. There can be no sadder creature than I shall be—none—on the face of all God's world; but I would rather stand here to-day, as I do now, a broken-hearted, lonely woman, than be you, Stanley Dennison, with the mark of Cain upon your brow——" Placing her hand against his breast, she had pressed him

backwards, so that he could but face her. Her eyes glowed like burning coals; her voice rang through the silent house. She was terrible in her intensity. Those from below had come up; those from above had come down. The two figures were the centre of an eager, silent crowd. Bad women and bad men were there; yet even they seemed to recoil from the shrinking, pallid man in the corner—he who had led the widow's son through devious and crooked ways, even unto death itself.

"You have murdered him! Murdered him! Murdered him!" cried the mad-dened woman. "You have taken him from me, left me desolate. I went down upon my knees to you once; he would have come back to me then, if you would have let him alone—but you would not, you would not——"

Her voice fell to a hoarse whisper, her head sank upon her breast. The remembrance of the ordeal still to be faced came upon her.

"Where is he?" she said. "Will some one take me to him?"

They led her in—these bad people who were so much more tender and good than better people might have been—and there, in a poor and narrow chamber, with the blind pinned askew across the window, lay all that was left to her of her son.

A white cloth, blood-bedabbled at the lower edge, lay upon the face. The long, slender outline of the figure was well defined beneath a flimsy sheet.

Mrs. Ruthven knelt by the bed, and, in spite of more than one detaining hand, pulled the face-cloth from the ghastly thing it covered. I say ghastly because the lower part of the jaw was shot away, the little, silky, golden moustache stiff with blood.

"My dear, my dear," I said, trembling, and scarce knowing what I did. "Come away, oh, come away, my dear!"

She looked up at me, and then I saw that the noble mind wandered, the brain was reeling from a shock too heavy to be borne.

"Come away!" she said, and smiled. "Come away and leave the boy when I have just found him! He is tired. He wants rest—sleep—quiet. I will hold him, as I always do, as I have done so often."

Some pitiful hand had drawn the kerchief over the shattered mouth. Only the calm, beautiful brow, the golden locks, the half-closed eyes beneath their long lashes were visible. She gathered the still form in her arms, drew the golden head to her

breast, and bowed her face upon that of the dead.

"It is mother," she crooned, "it is mother's arms that are round you. Try to sleep—my boy—my boy."

The women in the room broke out sobbing; the men turned aside.

Oh, pitiful and awful sight; the poor, dazed mother holding the dead boy in her arms, the boy dead by his own hand!

While I stood there bewildered, my hand upon that dark, kneeling figure, from whose prone head the black veil fell to the ground, there was a stir, and now, strange voices on the stairs, in the passage, in the room.

"It is the police inspectors," said some one near; and a man in uniform, with two others following, stepped up to the bedside.

"Clear the room," said the first comer, in an authoritative manner. "Stay, what is this?"

He touched the long veil. I stretched my arms over her.

"She is his mother," I said, and could say no more for tears.

"It don't matter who she is; she must go."

A great horror was upon me. Something in the drooping attitude of the kneeling figure by the bed sent a chill shudder through my veins. My arms fell heavily to my sides.

"None of this," said the man, harshly, unheeding of the murmurs that began to be heard among those around. "I tell you, whoever she is, she must go."

I lifted the head that lay beside that of the dead boy. The face was ashen, the lips livid, the eyes—Ah, Heaven! they would never look on me again.

"She has gone!" I said, speaking in what voice I know not, surely not my own. "She has gone; but at a higher call than yours."

There, I have told you my story; and now you know why I could not bear to hear the woman singing out in the shadowy night:

Some are gone from us for ever,  
Longer here they could not stay;  
They have reached a fairer region  
Far away—far away.

I have often asked myself Under what Leading Mrs. Ruthven took that strange journey to her dead son. But I have found no answer.

## KESTELL OF GREYSTONE.

A SERIAL STORY.

By ESMÉ STUART.

Author of "*Muriel's Marriage*," "*Joan Vellacot*,"  
"*A Faire Damzell*," etc., etc.

### CHAPTER LIII.

#### WILT THOU HAVE THIS MAN?

ST. JOHN'S church only boasted of one bell; and, true to the rules of more elaborate music, it was the length of the interval which settled the grave or gay of the occasion.

The rope being pulled vigorously, the wedding-bell, therefore, always sounded as if it were in a great hurry, and wished the bride and bridegroom not to keep it too long waiting and ringing.

But use is part of our second nature; and it was only the irreverent stranger who spoke slightly of the little tinkle.

On this occasion Miss Clara Heaton was very much fussed; it was difficult to be here, there, and everywhere, and more difficult still to keep an eye on Herbert. The crowd had gathered early, and swarmed into the church, packing itself considerably like a herring-barrel, and making the best of having to wait a long time by various whispered remarks on the floral decorations, and small pieces of information about the bride and bridegroom.

Mrs. Smith, senior, who was fanning herself vigorously with her pocket-handkerchief, as she held Tommy up to see his elders' heads and bonnets, remarked, in a loud whisper, to Mrs. Tubbs, that she hadn't had time to cook the dinner, and had hurried away, only just eating a dry crust, which was, in her opinion, "a poor substitute for the stomach." 'Liza's mother, who was not well versed in long words, accepted this statement without questioning, and added that she had had a bit before starting, because mother didn't like waiting; but she knew Mrs. Black had only warmed up a potato-pie, for Miss Heaton had told her there would be no getting into the church if they were late.

"There, now," whispered Mrs. Smith, beginning to wipe Tommy's face anyhow, without regard to the bearings of his features, thereby making him whimper, "I declare Miss Heaton has put off the mothers' meeting this afternoon on account of the wedding; but Mrs. Eagle Bennison wished us to come to Court Garden to-

morrow to have a tea and a bit of talking to."

"Mrs. Eagle Bennison," retorted Mrs. Black, "is wonderful with her tongue; she can expound Scripture a deal better than Miss Heaton, who always stops every minute as if she were trying to swallow cherry-stones; but Mrs. Eagle Bennison, she is never at a loss, like, and can explain every word in the Bible, so as to draw tears from the eyes. That she can."

"Well, now, does she really?" said Mrs. Smith, who was not given to going to meetings, and was not very partial to the mistress of Court Garden. "She asked me to come to join some society about the 'training of the dustrial poor;' but my husband says I'm not to go trapesing about to meetings; 'taint respectable, he thinks. But, lor', every one does it now, I tell him. He's behindhand, that he is."

"Hush!" said Mrs. Black, "there's Mr. Heaton coming to tidy up the bits of flowers. No, it ain't—it's young Johns; his long skirt is fine, and quite new."

"That's his hassock," corrected Mrs. Tubbs. "But maybe they're coming."

"Look, Tommy, your sister is outside smattering flowers for the lady to walk on, isn't she, darling?"

The excitement was great within the church, and a slight disappointment was felt by the congregation that they could not eat their cake and have it as well; in other words, the crowd within envied the crowd without. One seat on each side next to the entrance had been reserved for the few privileged persons who were to witness both the arrival of the bride and the ceremony in church. These were the servants of Rushbrook House, as of course they would come late on account of the press of work at the bride's home. The little girls who lined the path on each side looked like pink-tipped petals of daisies, and made a very pretty border to the churchyard with their pink frocks, and white hats, and their white baskets filled with white flowers. As the carriages began driving up, a little flutter of excitement thrilled through the daisies, and was communicated to the compact mass behind them. It was a real pleasure to the country folk to see such lovely garments, and to witness the certain bustle and excitement in the various groups that gathered at the gate awaiting the bride's arrival.

Walter Akister had been only too willing to accede to Elva's wish of a quiet wedding. He hated any kind of fuss or publicity, and was anxious enough to have the whole thing over; so no strangers were to be present, for Elva had positively rejected even the offer of her Fitzgerald cousins to see her married. She pleaded her mother's health, and the impossibility of getting any number of people into St. John's. Betta Akister was to be a sort of bridesmaid, and was to walk with Amice behind the bride. Mrs. Eagle Bennison had wondered that a rich man like Mr. Kestell was content with such a simple little affair; but then Elva was so spoilt, and her father humoured her shockingly.

The Squire and his wife came driving up just at the right time, and were received by Lord Cartmel, who was dreamily answering Miss Heaton's remarks about the sudden heat. He had been brought here by Betta, who stood arrayed in white, which colour contrasted painfully with her freckled, fair face.

Mrs. Eagle Bennison was quite equal to the occasion, and at once made everybody feel more cheerful by the constant display of her pearly teeth.

"Now really isn't this sweet and rural, Lord Cartmel? So like the simple wishes of our young pair? The little cottage girls are quite models of propriety; I see how delightful one's flowers look in those picturesque baskets! Our tiny church is quite charmingly decorated, I hear from George Guthrie; by the way, he ought to be here, naughty fellow, he will be late."

"He helped us with this arch," said Miss Heaton; "he has so much time on his hands that one does not mind asking him to do things. Now I think I shall go into church; one's presence prevents the people behaving irreverently."

"Yes, yes, just so. When I thought out the rules of the T.A.P.S., I also wished to inculcate reverence to all that is above. The poor are so apt to forget it. Now, really, I think I shall go in, too. And here are some more ladies. We had better go in together."

At last the Rushbrook carriage was seen driving slowly up the steep road. The two policemen began to clear a way in the outside crowd, who were not allowed to enter the churchyard, though they, of course, offered no interference to a gentleman who suddenly hurried in, hardly noticed in the general excitement, and who resolutely forced himself into a place near



to the church door, within the angle formed by a buttress. He could see here perfectly. Evidently he was not a wedding guest, for he had no favour, and no notice was taken of him.

Hoel did not wish to be seen; but he would come here unnoticed, if possible, to look once more at the woman whom he loved now above all worldly consideration. He must see her once more; he fancied he could tell if she were happy, if, indeed, his cruel desertion had killed her love, and she had been able to find comfort in Walter's unchanging affection. This was the mad wish that seized him—the wish that made him disregard all else. He saw, but took no heed of the crowd, of the pink school children; he heard remarks, but they did not reach his brain. He saw people he knew, but he did not apparently recognise them; and those few minutes of waiting were prolonged in his mind to a long age of intense suffering. There was Walter Akister and his best man stationed close beside him at the church door, but with their backs to him.

The last time he had seen Walter was when the cold, black water was closing over him. It was a very painful thought that he owed his life to him. In his delirium Sister Marie had told him that he had gone over the scene again and again. Should he in after years go over this scene? Should he always have that awful feeling of despair, of mute agony, that seemed to weigh him down physically as well as mentally? Was he really the light-hearted Hoel who had first seen this beautiful landscape. He felt he was a very different being, a man who had no interests, who would, after to-day, retire into the outside life of ordinary routine with no soul in it. For in the long run the study of self becomes very uninteresting, even if that self is out of the common order.

All this came dully before his mind; and then he wondered why he were here, and why he had come to add another torture to his already racked sensations; and meanwhile he looked with hungry eyes toward the triumphal arch under which Elva would walk.

All at once he saw her, and all the strength he had fancied he possessed forsook him, for it was not the old Elva he gazed at, but a pale reflex of the woman whose face he had traced again and again in his mental vision. Through the thin veil he saw her plainly; and even when

she first issued from under the flowery bower, he gazed and gazed again. She was leaning on the arm of her father. They were walking very slowly, for the little girls in shy delight began scattering their flowers before her feet. Elva had known nothing of this arrangement, and for a moment it seemed to pain her; she even paused an instant, and then—was it the strong attractive power of the electricity of love, or why should she have raised her head and suddenly turned her eyes straight towards Hoel? Their eyes met; in Elva's look there was mingled the deep reproach of injured love; in Hoel the saddest and humblest craving for forgiveness that human eyes can express.

Walter Akister had been waiting for the arrival of the bride at the arch to go into the church, and he was just about to do this—having given a glance down the path—when he, too, was arrested by Elva's pause. He turned towards her again, and took a few steps in her direction; but nobody noticed him, for all eyes were fixed on the bride.

Her white face suddenly flushed; her whole frame trembled, and so terribly overcome was she that she paused a moment, and leant more heavily on her father's arm. This unexpected stoppage caused Betta to tread on part of the long train which Amice loosely held, and for a second Walter fancied this was the reason of the whole episode. Then he, too, was made conscious of that electric force, that thought-wave of which we know so little, but which exists; and, turning sharply round in the direction of the bride's eyes, he, too, saw what had unnerved her—the presence of Hoel Fenner.

"Papa, papa," whispered Elva to her father, "he is there! Do you see him? He has come back. I cannot, I cannot go on. You said he never would——"

Mr. Kestell did not pause to analyse any feelings; he felt like a man who has seen in the near distance the tidal wave rushing towards him ready to engulf him; he forcibly drew on his child.

"Elva, dearest, recollect yourself; think of the many eyes on you. For Heaven's sake come on, you cannot stop now. Look! Walter is awaiting you."

The procession began to move on again; the little girls were not even conscious of a hitch, their individual efforts engrossing them. Even the closely-packed on-lookers behind them barely realised more than that the Honourable Miss Akister

had trodden on the white gown, and that Miss Amice looked scared, and dropped the train so that it swept over the white blossoms, collecting them into ungraceful heaps.

Walter by rights should now have been in church; but he cared nothing about appearances, and heeded not the almost audible whisper of his best man to come on.

His brows knitted, and his eyes gleamed with an unnatural look, as he glanced from the bride to Hoel Fenner; the veins started in his forehead, and the blood rushed to his cheeks, so that Elva and her father were close to him before he recollected that he was in public, and that many eyes, even if they were rustic eyes, would now be fixed on him.

"Go in, Walter," murmured Mr. Kestell; his lips were ashy pale.

"Yes, yes; but what business has that fellow here? I will have him turned out. I—"

"It's all right, Akister," again murmured Mr. Kestell. "Go in. You are stopping the way."

"And I will, too, till he is off."

Passion had got the better of him; and Elva, once more pale, gazed in horror at the face of the man she was about to marry.

Even this had happened so quickly, that it was difficult for the onlookers to make anything of it. But impatience to follow the bride now caused the cordon of pink girls close to the church door to be broken, and the bridal party were by this means forced forward in confusion.

In vain Mr. Kestell waved his disengaged arm, and cried, "Keep off!" He was not regarded; and in another second he and Elva, followed by the bridesmaids, found themselves, with little ceremony, walking up the aisle towards the chancel steps, where Mr. Heaton and the archdeacon were waiting to perform the marriage ceremony.

Among the first to force his way in, in spite of opposition, was Hoel; only just in time, however, for the policeman, seeing a commotion, now forcibly cleared the entrance, and managed to bar the way across the open door.

But no policeman could have stopped Hoel from entering. He had been utterly unconscious of Walter's look of hatred, unconscious of everything but of Elva's reproach, a reproach which humbled him to the dust.

"Thou art the man," ran through his ears—"thou, Hoel Fenner; the irreproachable in thine own sight—thou hast done this thing; thou hast ruined a woman's life, her faith, her belief. Why complain that thy punishment is heavy?"

And this punishment was not a small thing to him—it was a living death. He could not blame any one but himself, and he could but repeat again and again:

"Elva, if you had waited; if— But why should you have waited?"

The marriage service had begun. The wedding guests were ranged in the front seats, and were conspicuous from their fine clothes. George Guthrie had stepped in, as he thought, rather late, through the vestry door, but taking the end seat in the Squire's pew, he waited in some anxiety the appearance of Walter. It surprised him at last when bride and bridegroom seemed suddenly to present themselves at once; and as he turned round he noticed the disturbance at the door.

George, who could see the bride's profile, remarked her pale face, and, nearer to him, the black look and knitted brows of Walter. He could not see Mr. Kestell's face, but evidently the chief actors in the wedding were in a very unusual state of mind.

"Eh, well. What is in the wind now?" thought George, turning over the leaves of his Prayer-book in such an absent-minded way, that Mrs. Eagle Bennison handed him hers, with the right place found, and a look, meaning:

"Oh, George, don't you know? It's because you are a bachelor."

George Guthrie glanced at "Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here;" then, without paying much more attention to the words, again fixed his eyes on the small semicircle round Mr. Heaton. "Thirdly, it was ordained," said Herbert Heaton's clear voice, "for the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other both in prosperity and in adversity——"

"By Jove, Elva's going to make a fool of herself!" thought George, and placed his hands behind him, as if to do away with the sight of the obnoxious service book. "If there's one thing I hate more than another it's the marriage service under these circumstances."

He would have thought this much more had he known of Hoel's presence at the end of the church.

"Let him now speak, or else hereafter for ever hold his peace."

George Guthrie actually opened his lips; but there are many men who wish to say something that is on their minds, but for ever hold their peace.

"Good gracious, I nearly made a scene," he thought, with a sigh of intense relief that his better judgement had prevailed.

Of the people most concerned, only Elva heard every word of the service now proceeding. Walter felt that Mr. Heaton was conceitedly slow, and that he might, for all their sakes, hurry on through this uninteresting service; but each word fell like the sound of a knell on Elva's ears. It was wonderful she could remain so still, so outwardly immovable; wonderful that she did not do more than clasp her hands very firmly together. She did not believe Hoel was in church; but he had been close beside her, he had come back. They—her father, Amice, and Walter—had all said he would never come here again; they had promised she should never, never see him any more, and yet here he was.

She heard, through all her thoughts, that slow knell of words distinctly. Had she no friend here, no one to help her? Was she left quite, quite alone? She suddenly raised her eyes to Herbert Heaton's face, and it seemed to her as if it were the face of an angel: so pure, so good did he look, and so earnest was his tone. She heard, with a new hearing, as he slowly repeated:

"I require and charge you both, as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgement, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, that if either of you know any impediment why ye may not be lawfully joined together in matrimony, ye do now confess it. For, be ye well assured, that so many as are coupled together otherwise than God's word doth allow, are not joined together by God, neither is their matrimony lawful."

Herbert Heaton meant every word he said; and, as if to impress this more on her mind, Elva fancied that, for an instant, he looked at her searchingly. The secrets of all hearts must one day be disclosed, and in her heart there was a lie. She did not love this man, but another. Unworthy, cruel, he might be; but she had loved him, and with her to love once was to love always. How could she have consented to do this? and now, now, it was too late. Before Heaven, she was going to utter a lie. How could she? But then, how avoid it? She became suddenly conscious of the hundreds of eyes fixed on her—cruel, pitiless eyes

they seemed to her. She was certain they were looking to see her tell this lie. She saw their impatience and the eagerness in which their owners stretched forward. Was this purgatory? Were they all fiends, ready with their shout of derision? Was she going mad? She clasped her hands tighter. She must steady her thoughts. Herbert Heaton was listening to hear if she would sell her soul for her father's sake. But he, too, had deceived her. Everybody had deceived her, for Hoel had come back.

The pause ended; and how many thoughts can be flashed through a human brain in a short pause. Herbert Heaton turned towards Walter.

"Wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour and keep her in sickness and in health, and, forsaking all other, keep thee only unto her so long as ye both shall live?"

"I will," answered Walter Akister in a clear, impatient, fierce voice.

Yes; now it was her turn. The judge was calling upon her for the truth. No, it was Herbert Heaton—Herbert, who, like Amice, had always done his duty; who had nothing to hide, nothing he was ashamed of in his heart.

"As you will answer at the dreadful day of judgement——"

Was Herbert Heaton saying this? No, no; not that; but very slowly and solemnly he was asking:

"Wilt thou obey him, and serve him, love, honour, and keep him in sickness and in health——"

Could she—could she do this—this? Could she tell this lie; she, who prided herself on truth, even for her father's sake? No—no, not for his sake; because his name was unsullied, was honourable. She would not.

"So long as you both shall live."

There was an awful silence in the church. The congregation all strained their necks and their ears to catch the bride's last words, for that was part of the entertainment provided for them. You might have heard a pin drop; but the figure in white, with the thin veil falling about her in softest folds, never stirred; only the hands were clasped tightly and the lips firmly closed.

Herbert Heaton bent a little towards her, and, fancying she was nervous, whispered:

"Say, 'I will.'"

Walter, too, turned towards her—love seemed strangely akin to hate—as he, too, whispered :

"Elva, speak ; do you understand ?"

Her lips moved. She felt as if she were turning to stone, petrified by the countless eyes that were upon her. She heard the rustle of Mrs. Eagle Bennison's mauve silk dress. She felt Amice come close up to her and whisper her name. She saw her father make a step towards her, with speechless terror written on his face ; and then again the words rang out clearly :

"As you will answer at the dreadful day of judgement."

No one word had ever before so electrified the congregation of St. John's on the Moor as Elva's "No !" which, if low, was startlingly clearly enunciated.

"What nonsense !" muttered Walter. "Heaton, go on, I tell you ; go on."

He made as if he would forcibly take one of her clasped hands ; but only Herbert Heaton saw this. He placed himself gently between them.

"Do you mean this 'No' ?" he whispered, trying even now to shield her if she had made a mistake. "Are you sure ? Do you remember what you are doing ?"

But the strain had been too great. The eyes appeared to her to dart out of their sockets like a hundred flashes of cruel lightning ; the crowd of grinning demons seemed to close her in. She wanted to repeat the words, "before God ;" but she felt tongue-tied, and, without a sound, she fell fainting upon Amice.

The scene of confusion that followed can scarcely be described. Every person started as if to get out of their seat and come to the rescue ; but George Guthrie was ready at once with his command :

"Keep back, keep back, please. The bride has only fainted. She will recover in a few moments."

He was by her side and lifted her in his strong arms before any one had quite recovered from the shock of surprise, and, with the help of Mr. Heaton, they carried her quickly to the vestry ; Amice following, and several other ladies also. Mr. Kestell looked for a moment quite bewildered, as if he did not the least understand what had taken place, till the shy Betta, suddenly seized with compassion, whispered :

"They are looking after her, Mr. Kestell."

It will be all right ; she will be soon better. Won't you sit down ; or——"

Mr. Kestell looked up at her, then round at the excited crowd that was standing up, and covered his face with his hands.

"Is this shame ?" he said in a hoarse whisper ; "public shame ? Oh, it is dreadful."

"No, no," said Betta, not understanding what he could mean. "Elva will come out again, and the service will be finished."

Mr. Kestell shook his head, cast another glance at the people, and hurried suddenly away through the choir and on towards the vestry.

The poor people whispered ; men spoke audibly, much to Miss Heaton's distress. She rose up, and, turning towards the crowd, shook her head vigorously and held up her finger ; but the catastrophe was altogether too great to be received mutely. Suddenly, George Guthrie came quickly out of the vestry, and, facing the people, he said, in his kind voice :

"My friends, go home quietly. Miss Kestell is not well. The wedding will not take place to-day."

Then, going down to Miss Heaton, he said :

"We are taking her to the Vicarage. Will you go and help Amice ?"

The congregation clattered out as if the church were on fire. The truth was, they themselves were burning to tell somebody. In a few minutes the building was empty of all except one man, who was crouching against the wall in the last seat.

"Oh, God," he said, kneeling down and hiding his face, "I shall have to go through the agony again. A man can die more than once, even here."

Ready June 16th, price Sixpence.

## THE EXTRA SUMMER NUMBER

OF

All the Year Round,

Consisting of a Complete Story, entitled

## A MIST OF ERROR,

BY

MARY ANGELA DICKENS.

*The Right of Translating Articles from ALL THE YEAR ROUND is reserved by the Authors.*